

POCKET PC
EXPERT

FAQ

Q Is it possible to edit photos on my Pocket PC as well as view them?

A There are several good photo-viewer programs available for Pocket PC, but most of them allow only limited editing, usually little more than the ability to change the brightness and contrast of images.

Spb Imageer (which is \$15, around £9, from www.spbsoftwarehouse.com) goes a lot further, with the ability to crop and resize images, remove red-eye from flash photos, blur or sharpen, change the hue, saturation and contrast, and even tweak the colour balance.

Resco Photo Viewer (\$25, around £14, from www.resco-net.com) doesn't offer as many editing features, but it supports more image formats, including RAW. Both programs have an excellent slideshow feature for viewing your photos with a variety of transition effects.

If you're looking for complete flexibility to edit your digital photos right down to individual pixel level, there's nothing better than Pocket Artist (which is \$50, around £29, from www.conduits.com).

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Using e-books

Pocket PCs provide a way for you to store and read dozens of books when you're on the move. **Steve Clack** looks at the software available to help you join the e-book revolution

Though still something of an oddity to many people, the world of electronic books (e-books) is maturing nicely. Just a few years ago, you'd be lucky to find anything other than 100-year-old classics to read on your PDA, but there's now a good selection of everything from the latest Stephen King and James Patterson novels to a host of non-fiction titles. There are still plenty of titles that haven't made it into electronic format, but you'll easily find a vast supply of good-quality reading matter, regardless of your reading tastes.

With so many excellent books on offer, usually at a price that's notably lower than their paper equivalent, why has the average Pocket PC user never read a single novel on their handheld? To begin with, the Microsoft Reader e-book reader software that comes bundled free with every Pocket PC tends to be sluggish when it comes to launching the application and opening your book to the last position, which can be off-putting to anyone used to the immediate convenience of picking up a paper book and thumbing through it.

What's more, in order to buy and read books, it's necessary to activate the software. This is a painless online process that takes no more than a few minutes, but it could be enough of an obstacle to deter anyone who's already doubtful about whether to try e-books.

TAKING THE PLUNGE

Reading a large volume of e-book text on a small handheld screen will feel a little odd at first. After all, you've probably been reading paper books exclusively for many years. Be prepared to persevere a little until you start to get used to onscreen reading and begin to appreciate the benefits.

Aside from the convenience of being able to keep dozens of books in your pocket, e-books have lots of other advantages. You are taken back to the last page you were reading automatically whenever you close and re-open a book. You can highlight phrases and passages for future reference and easily look them up again later. And you can read even in complete darkness.

Readability seems to be a huge concern for those yet to try e-books. But the way modern Pocket PCs' ClearType smoothes out fonts makes it surprisingly comfortable to read large amounts of text onscreen, particularly as Pocket PC screens use considerably smaller pixels than desktop or notebook computers. For the ultimate digital-reading experience, VGA-resolution Pocket PCs such as the excellent Dell Axim X51v and Fujitsu Siemens Pocket LOOX 720 display fabulously clear, smooth text on their 480x640 pixel screens, with a clarity that's barely distinguishable from print on paper.

Clarity isn't just about resolution, though, and when reading on your handheld you can set the screen to just the right level of brightness and contrast to provide maximum comfort, something you can't do with paper books.

CHOOSING YOUR SOFTWARE

Before buying and downloading your first e-book, you'll need to get set up with the right software. There are three different formats for e-books, excluding Adobe's eBook format, which doesn't currently work well on handhelds. All three systems use special encryption to prevent people simply giving away copies of their e-books to other people for free, so each of them can read only books that are created specifically for that system. The three formats are Microsoft Reader, eReader and Mobipocket.

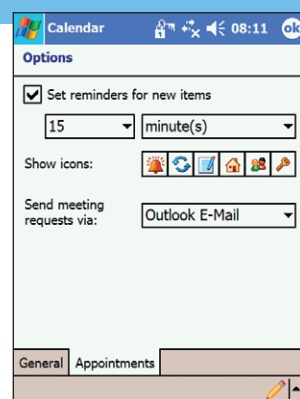
Don't be concerned that you need to choose one format exclusively, as each one offers a different selection of books. Although there's a lot of overlap, you may wish to use all three to give yourself the biggest selection of titles to choose from. It doesn't need to cost you anything: Microsoft Reader is free and so is the latest version of Mobipocket Reader.

Mobipocket Reader works beautifully on Pocket PCs. It's snappier than Microsoft Reader, and the simple setup process allows you to read your purchased books on up to three devices at a time, including your desktop

Adding icons to your Calendar

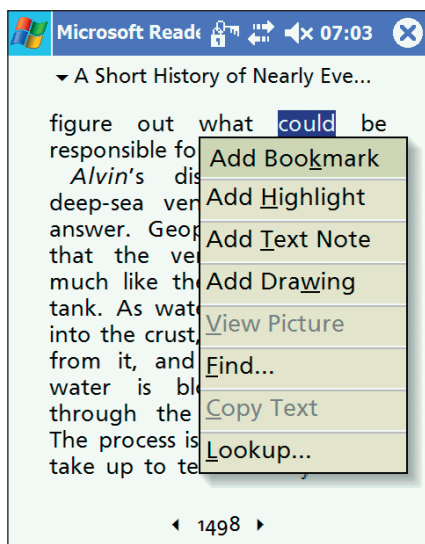
Advanced Calendar replacements such as Pocket Informant (www.pocketinformant.com/uk) and Agenda Fusion (www.developerone.com) allow you to add descriptive icons to categorise calendar entries for easier identification. The built-in Calendar software doesn't allow you to do this, but there is a feature that lets you display a number of the attributes of each entry, making life easier.

To enable this, select the Options menu item from within Calendar. Pick the Appointments tab from the bottom of the screen. You'll see a row of icons and can enable those you wish to display by tapping on them. Tap-and-hold any of the icons to see what they represent. From left to right, they are: Reminder (whether item has an alarm assigned to it), Recurs (if event repeats), Note (whether item has a text note attached), Location (whether a geographical location is set for the appointment), Attendees (whether attendees have been

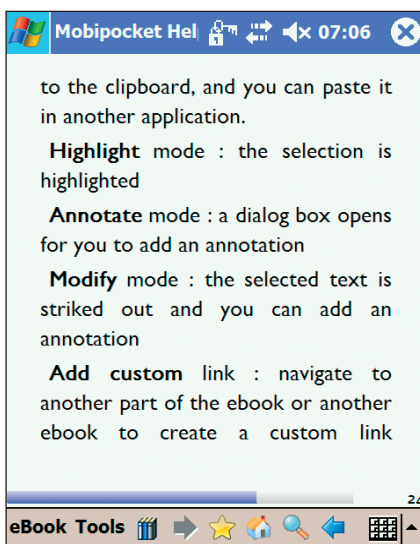


Appointments contains a row of icons, and you enable those you wish to display by tapping on them

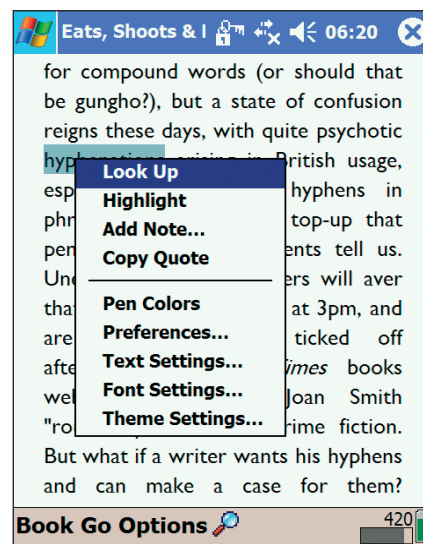
designated) and Private (whether item has been flagged as private). Icons for chosen attributes will appear to the right of the corresponding Calendar entry in the Day and Week views.



▲ Microsoft Reader lets you add bookmarks, highlights and text notes to e-books



▲ In Mobipocket, you can add annotations and you can also add custom links



▲ Using eReader you can look up words, add highlights and notes, and change various settings

PC. You can also download newsfeeds to your desktop from sources such as the BBC, and keep those on the handheld alongside your book collection.

The Pro version of the eReader software costs \$10 (around £7), but it's a delight to use and well worth the money. If you don't want to spend any money there's a free version, which lacks some of the customisable display settings and dictionary lookup features of the Pro version but still offers all the basic functionality. All three programs offer dictionary lookup of any word with just a quick tap of the stylus, which is another benefit over printed books.

Microsoft Reader comes with a fairly basic dictionary for free and eReader comes with a pretty good free offering, and these can be

substituted with a variety of add-on dictionaries, all at sensible prices. Mobipocket Reader offers the ultimate in dictionary add-ons, with a huge variety of foreign and specialist dictionaries available for separate purchase, as well as an illustrated Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia and Concise Oxford English Dictionary.

BUYING BOOKS

The reader software is simply a means to an end; the books themselves are the really important part, so much so that you should spend a little time browsing the main e-book shops before choosing your reader software.

First, take a look at the following sites: www.microsoft.com/reader (exclusively Microsoft Reader format), www.ereader.com

(eReader only) and www.mobipocket.com (Mobipocket only). As well as providing good starting points for finding out what books are available, these are also the places to download the latest versions of the reader software.

For a selection of books in all formats, Fictionwise (www.fictionwise.com) is probably the best. Other sites worth a look are PDA Bookstore (www.pdabookstore.com), Diesel e-books (www.diesel-e-books.com) and e-book Impressions (www.e-bookimpressions.com). Mobipocket has recently been bought by Amazon, the online bookseller. So it's likely that we'll see a big selection of books available from Amazon in the near future, which is something that could send the popularity of e-books skyrocketing.

SPB SOFTWARE HOUSE

Spb Backup



\$20 (around £11)

It's hugely beneficial to keep regular backups of your Pocket PC data on an SD or CF storage card, in addition to your usual ActiveSync backups. Not only are card backups faster to restore than via ActiveSync, in our experience they're more reliable too. We've been unable to restore from ActiveSync on more than one occasion. Add to this that you can be back in action within minutes if you're unlucky enough to experience a hard reset while away from your desk, and the idea becomes compelling.

Until now, Sprite Backup (www.sprite-software.com) was the best option for those without card backup software bundled with their handheld. Spb Software House, one of the most prolific Pocket PC software houses, has just entered the market with the first version of its own backup software. It's very capable, and it is \$10 (around £7) cheaper than Sprite Backup. In terms of speed it's comparable with

Sprite Backup, taking less than five minutes to back up or restore the entire memory contents of a 128MB handheld.

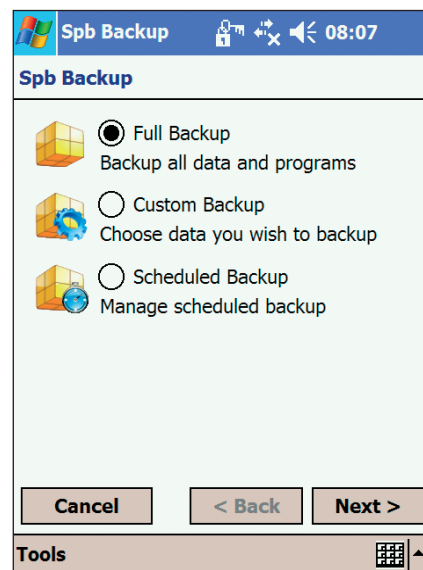
Spb Backup works by creating a single self-extracting file containing an entire backup image. As well as performing a full restore of a wiped handheld, taking it back to where you were at the point of the last backup, there's the option to restore only PIM data, emails, the contents of your My Documents folder or system details. This isn't as flexible as Sprite Backup, which lets you choose your restore options down to individual file level, but it's still adequate for most users.

To save you the trouble of having to remember to back up every day, the software allows you to set up a completely automated backup regime, running in the middle of the night if you wish, then automatically performing a soft reset at the end, which is a requirement of all Pocket PC backup programs. It even

SUMMARY

- ✓ Good value
- ✓ Reliable
- ✗ Can't restore individual files

DETAILS www.natara.com



▲ Spb Backup has a range of options to keep your handheld's data safe

includes a neat Today screen plug-in that displays the time of the last and next scheduled backups. Most important for any backup software, it appears to be very reliable. We tried a number of forced resets while testing Spb Backup, and it restored all our data perfectly every time. **CE**